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ABSTRACT

This study focused on three objectives: (1) to identify those activities which school counselors perceive to be their greatest time wasters; (2) to identify the percentage of time counselors believe they spend on each of the primary counselor job functions; and (3) to compare those perceptions with counselors' ideal allocation of their time. Survey questionnaires sent to 300 randomly selected Ohio counselors were completed by 210 elementary, middle school/junior high, and secondary counselors, and by 207 principals located at the respective schools. Respondents were asked to estimate the percentage of counselors' work time actually spent on each of nine categories of counselor activities. They also indicated the "ideal" percentage of time they would prefer (or that principals would prefer counselors) to spend on each of the activity areas. The findings revealed that counselors spent over 40% of their time on individual or group counseling. Both counselors and their principals tended to agree in both the actual and ideal distribution of counselor time. Both groups reported a desire to see counselors spend a greater proportion of their time providing direct counseling services. One encouraging finding of the study was the accuracy of the building principals' perceptions of how counselors spent their time and congruence with the counselors' ideal distribution of time. Nine tables are provided. (TE)

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School Counselor's Time: A Comparison of Counselors' and Principals' Perceptions and Desires

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the
American Association for Counseling and Development
Cincinnati, Ohio
March 16-19, 1990

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

"Do school counselors really have time to do any counseling?" is asked frequently by prospective counseling students. Parents, teachers, students and administrators are heard to comment that counselors spend most of their time scheduling, testing and shuffling papers. In an era of increased demand for accountability, school boards, administrators, and state legislatures want assurance that resources are being used wisely and in activities which will make a difference. The concern that counselors must devote large amounts of time to non-counseling functions have led several states legislatures to mandate that a minimal percentage (typically 60-75 percent) of school counselors' time must be devoted to direct student services. For example, legislation enacted by the state of Florida specifies that "School counselors shall spend at least 75 percent of work time providing direct counseling related to students, and shall devote not more than 25 percent of work time to administrative activities, provided that such activities relate to the provision of guidance services."

Recognizing the importance of safeguarding the counselor's time, the ASCA role statement (1981) stipulates that it is the counselor's responsibility to the profession to use "time and skills in an organized and systematic way to help students and resist any effort aimed at unreasonable use of time for non-guidance activities."

Since the beginning of school counseling, the role and function has been examined, posed, debated and re-examined (Podemski & Childers, 1987; Wilgus and Shelley, 1988). All of this discourse has yet to result in a clear consensus on the school counselor's role or function. In comparing counselors', teachers', and principals' ratings of ideal and actual roles of counselors, (Suzan, 1979) found a significant difference between what counselors actually do and what they perceive as their ideal roles, while principals saw little inconsistency between the counselor's actual and ideal activities. Research by Bonebrake and Borgers (1984) revealed little disagreement between elementary counselors and principals as to the degree of emphasis which should be placed on 15 different counselor activities. Saeedpour (1986) found no significant differences between secondary principals and counselors on either ideal or actual counselor roles.

Barry (1984) reported that 58% of the secondary school counselors said they do develop class schedules, only 26% believed they should do so. One-third of the principals agreed that counselors should be developing class schedules. Kameen, Robinson, and Rotter (1985) found that 64% of elementary and middle school counselors actually coordinate educational records but only 46% believe they should do so.

Morse and Russell (1988) reported that elementary counselors would prefer to work with groups of students much more than they currently do. School disciplinarian, substitute teacher, lunchroom supervisor, and evaluation assistant are not seen as part of their professional role by elementary counselors. In studies by Tenneyson et al. (1989) and Wilgus & Shelley (1988) secondary school counselors estimated that they more frequently engaged in counseling and consulting than in any other activities, accounting for 48% of the counselors time in the latter investigation. Vacc (1981) found that 95% of the secondary school counselors surveyed participated in class scheduling and 98% engaged in testing and assessment activities.

This study focused upon three major objectives: 1) to identify those activities which school counselors perceive to be their greatest time wasters, 2) to identify the percentage of time counselors believe they spend on each of the primary counselor job functions, and 3) to compare those perceptions with counselors' ideal allocation of their time.

METHOD

Instrument

A pilot study (Partin, 1984) solicited nominations from 45 school counselors soliciting nominations of their worst "time robbers", activities which detracted from their delivery of guidance and counseling services. The twelve "time robbers" mentioned by three or more counselors were listed in the survey developed for this study. Respondents indicated on a seven point Likert scale the extent to which each of the twelve "time robbers" detracts from their guidance and counseling functions. Demographic information on the grade level in which they work, number of students in their district, the number of counselors employed in the district.

The counselors' survey instrument contained a listing of the major categories of counselor activities based upon the Ohio nine dimensions of guidance (Ohio Department of Education, 1976). As the functions included in the nine dimensions may overlap and do not include non-guidance activities of counselors, they were modified by a panel of counselor educators . Counselors were asked to estimate the percentage of their work time which was

actually spent on each of nine activity areas, such that the sum equaled 100%. They were also to indicate their "ideal " percentage of time they would prefer to spend on each of the activity areas. The counselors were also asked to indicate the percentage of their individual or group counseling time which was spent on educational, career or person/social counseling.

The principals' version of the questionnaire contained the identical listing of guidance activities as used in the counselors' survey. The principals were asked to estimate the percentage of time which they believe their building counselors actually spent on each of nine activity areas, such that the sum equaled 100%. They were also to indicate percentage of time they would ideally prefer to have their counselors spend on each of the activity areas. Principals also listed demographic data on building level, student enrollment, availability of computers, and secretarial help for counselors.

Data Collection Procedures

The questionnaire was mailed to 300 randomly selected Ohio elementary, middle school/junior high, or secondary counselors with 100 counselors selected at each level. The building principals employed in the same buildings as each of the selected counselors were sent the principal's version of the questionnaire. A three week follow-up letter and second questionnaire was sent to non-respondents. There were 210 of the counselors surveys returned, representing a 70% response rate. Surveys were received from 52 elementary, 83 middle/junior high, and 70 high school counselors. A total of 207 , or 69%, of the principals returned their questionnaires. Surveys were received from 45 elementary, 82 middle/junior high, and 61 high school principals. Nine administrators indicated that they held a position other than building principal.

RESULTS

Means, standard deviations and ANOVA analyses for elementary, middle/junior high, and senior counselors ratings of their greatest time robbers are provided in Table 1. Sheffé's post hoc analysis was used to determine how the three groups differed. Elemen-

tary, middle, and senior high counselors all rated paper work as their greatest time robber. Senior high counselors rated scheduling duties (mean = 5.04) as much of a time robber as paperwork (mean = 5.07). Not surprisingly, senior high counselors assessed scheduling to be significantly (p <.05) more of a problem than did middle school/junior high counselors (mean = 4.18), which middle/junior high counselors rated scheduling as more troublesome than elementary counselors (mean = 2.06). Time spent on administrative tasks was seen as significantly more wasteful by senior high counselors (mean = 4.04) than elementary counselors (mean = 2.94).

Middle/junior high counselors found resolving discipline problems (mean = 3.40) to be more of a time robber than either elementary (mean = 2.67) or senior high (mean = 2.50) counselors. Elementary school counselors rated teaching duties (mean = 2.74) as significantly more of a time robber than did middle/junior high (mean = 2.07) or senior high (mean =1.42) counselors.

Counselors' perceptions of how they actually spend their time and their preferred or ideal distribution of their time are depicted in Table 2. T-test comparisons between actual and ideal time usage find counselors would prefer to spend significantly more time in individual counseling, group counseling, and professional development activities and significantly less time in testing/student appraisal and administrative/clerical activities (p<.001). While they indicated that they actually spend approximately 40% of their time in either individual or group counseling they would prefer to allocate at least 50% to counseling activities.

ANOVA comparisons of the counselors' perceived time usage by level revealed that elementary counselors spend approximately twice as much time on classroom guidance activities than do middle/junior high or senior high counselors (See Table 3). Administrative and clerical activities consume over 17% or senior high counselors time, significantly more than either elementary or middle/junior high school counselors. No significant differences were found among the three levels in the proportion of time spent on individual or group counseling. However, distinct differences in the types of counseling do occur. As shown in Table 4, elementary counselors spend almost 78% of their counseling time on personal/social issues, significantly (p <.05) higher than the 53.9% of middle/junior high counselors or 28.3% reported by senior high counselors. Conversely, senior high counselors report

that of the time they spend counseling 47.7% is spent in educational counseling and 22.15% on career counseling. Both of these areas include some scheduling and college placement related conferences.

In their ideal distribution of time, elementary counselors would opt to spend approximately the same amount (23%) as present on classroom guidance activities, significantly higher than the 13.7% or middle/junior high counselors or 15.21% of high school counselors (See Table 5). Senior high counselors would like to increase their time in counseling from 31% to 37% and to cut time on administrative and clerical tasks from over to 17% to about 7%.

School principals were generally congruent with their counselors in both the actual and ideal distributions of counselor time (See Tables 6 & 7). Principals would prefer counselors spend more ($p < .05$) time in group counseling and less time in administrative/clerical and non guidance/counseling repeated activities.

As elementary school counselors are not yet mandated in Ohio, many schools do not employ elementary counselors. Those schools employing elementary counselors had done so for an average of 6.9 years. Fifty percent of the elementary school counselors included in this study were assigned to more than one building, with 13.8 percent assigned to four or more buildings. Elementary school counselors were awarded contracts for an average of 188.58 days, while the average contract length for middle/junior high and senior high counselors was 194.28 and 195.36 days, respectively.

Full-time secretaries were assigned to 31.25 percent of all counselors (See Table 8). Clerical assistance was available through a shared secretary to 49.48 percent, with 19.27 percent having no secretarial help available. In no instances were full-time secretaries assigned to elementary counselors, with one-third having no secretarial services available. Over 70 percent of the high school counselor offices had a full-time secretary, although 11.86 percent of the high school counselors reported they had no secretarial services.

Computers are now in 51.78 percent of all counselors' offices. While relatively few (13.95 percent) elementary counselors have computers, 50 percent of the middle /junior high and80.32 percent of the high school counselors do have computers in their offices (See Table 9).

Counselors do counsel! Although both counselors and their principals would like to see them spending a greater proportion of their time providing direct counseling services, over 40 % of their time is already devoted to individual or group counseling. The combined total spent on counseling and consultation constitutes 52% of school counselors' time, congruent with the finding of Wilgus & Shelley (1988). Both counselors and their principals would like to see the proportion diminished. As secretarial services and computers become increasingly available to school counselors, the percentage of time devoted to non-counseling tasks may decrease further

Consistent with the findings of Bonebrake and Borgers (1984) and Saeedpour (1986) counselors and their principals tended to agree in both the actual and ideal distribution of counselor time. One of the most encouraging findings of this study is the accuracy of the building principals' perceptions of how counselors do spend their time and congruence with the counselors ideal distribution.

Additional research investigating teacher's and students' perceptions of how school counselors spend their time would be valuable in identifying misconceptions and potential public relations problems. While logistically a challenge, research recording the actual use of counselor time over an extended period would be most valuable in validating the counselors self-perceptions of time usage.

Particularly for senior high counselors, paperwork, scheduling, and administrative tasks are seen as significant time robbers which deter counselors from allotting more time to individual and group counseling. In some schools, often small rural ones, the counselor's role has evolved into that of an assistant principal. If not on paper, at least by default, the counselor's job description has grown to encompass a vast array of non-counseling/ guidance duties, from supervising restrooms to conducting school fund drives. This seems to be less the case with elementary counselors, although they are asked to substitute for absent teachers more often than middle/junior high or senior high teachers.

In an era of limited economic resources and increased demands for public accountability, it is essential that priorities for the use of counselor time be carefully established. Counselors can monitor the use of their time through daily time logs. Not only do time logs provide valuable feedback to counselors on where their time goes, the logs can also be presented to their administrators and faculty to clarify what services counselors are providing. Administrators and policy makers are more likely to respond to hard data that mere complaints that counselors have too much to do and too little time.

Whenever counselors are requested to take on an additional non-counseling duty, the question should be posed, "In place of what?" Because time is finite, any additional task must be at the expense of something else. The core of effective time management always involves establishing priorities. Which uses of counselors' time are going to pay the greatest dividends for the students and the school community? If counselors quickly acquiesce to external pressures to take on new projects and duties, others may begin to assume that those counselors must not have had enough to do before or that what they were doing wasn't important.

School counselors must take an active and assertive role in communicating to their publics how their time is being used and in safeguarding their most precious resource from further erosion by non-guidance or counseling related activities. Administrators, students, faculty, as well as legislators must be persuaded that the schools resources are best used and students best served when counselor's time is safeguarded from clerical, administrative, and menial duties and preserved for those professional functions for which they have specialized training.

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Figure 1

School Counselors' Use of Time

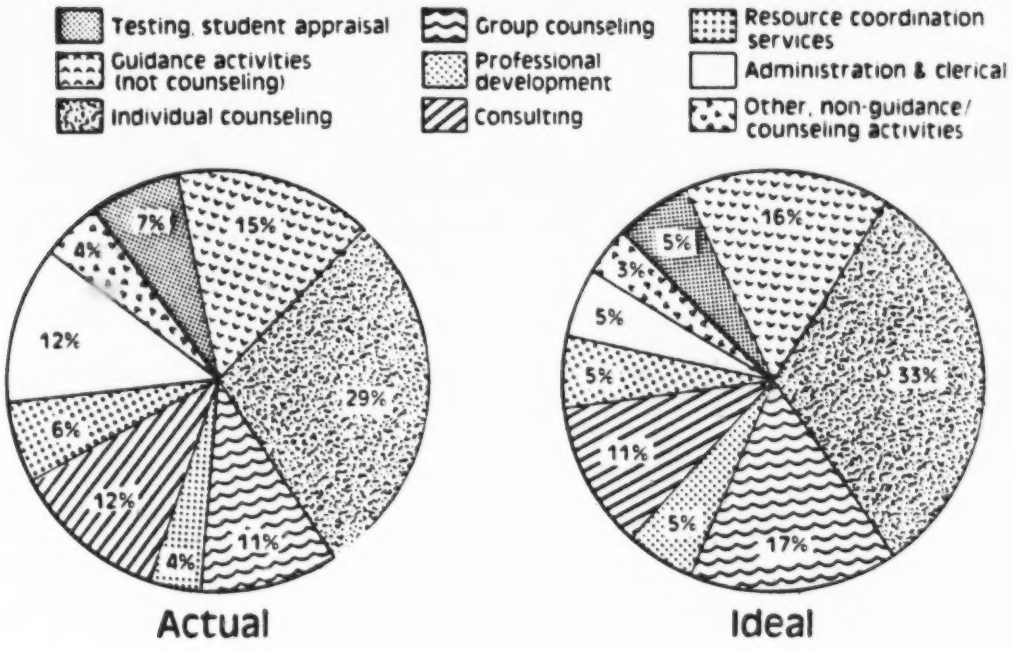

Figure 2

School Principals' Perceptions of Actual and Ideal Use of Counselors' Time

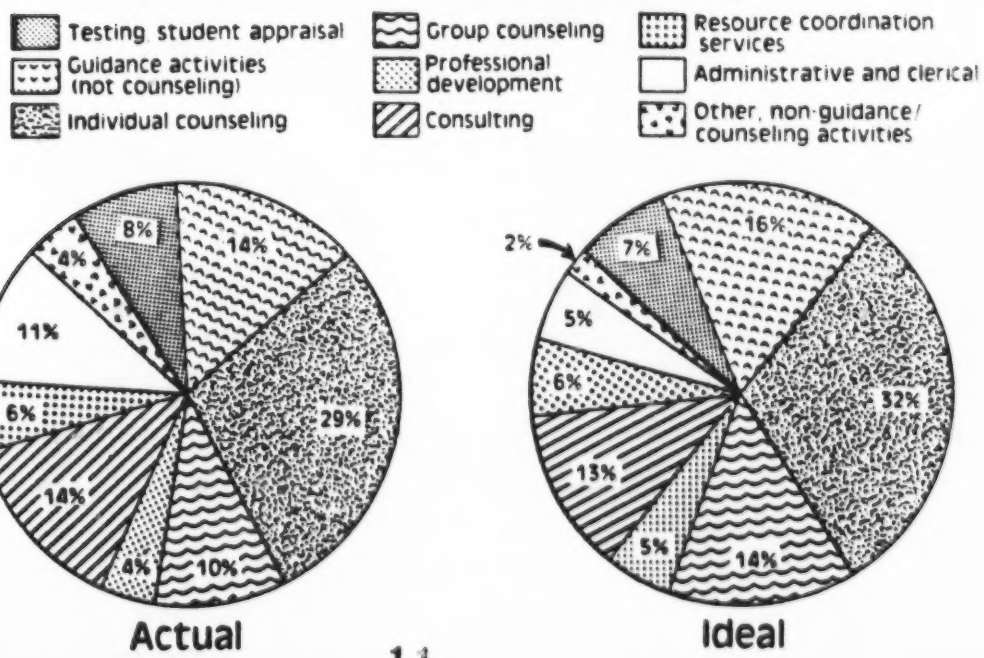

Table 1
Counselors' Time Robbers

	All N=206		Elementary N=51		Middle/Jr. N=83		Senior N=69	
Activity	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean.	S.D.
Attending meetings	3.23	1.18	3.04	1.11	3.23	1.37	3.33	.98
Scheduling	3.99	1.72	2.06[a]	1.32	4.18*[a]	1.36	5.04*	1.14
Administrative tasks	3.56	1.44	2.94[a]	1.30	3.49	1.31	4.04*	1.44
Paperwork (reports, correspondence, records)	4.48	1.40	3.78	1.42	4.42[a]	1.31	5.07*	1.22
Supervising students (lunch, study hall, etc.)	2.22	1.56	2.00	1.24	2.65*	1.63	1.87[a]	1.61
Teaching duties	1.96	1.60	2.73*	1.91	2.07	1.52	1.42[a]	1.14
Nursing duties, attending ill students	1.61	.88	1.43[a]	.70	1.92[a]	1.03	1.38[a]	.71
Secretarial duties	2.85	1.57	2.21	1.32	3.19	1.56	2.96	1.65
Listening to complaints (other than students)	3.16	1.21	3.39	1.24	3.16	1.27	3.01	1.11
Talking on the telephone	3.47	.09	3.31	1.09	3.38	1.29	3.61	1.23
Resolving discipline problems	2.92	1.44	2.67[a]	1.40	3.40*	1.59	2.50[a]	1.18
Subbing for teachers	1.75	.95	1.62	.87	2.06*	1.03	1.45[a]	.80

[a] Means are significantly lower than means marked *
*$p < .05$

Table 2

Counselors' and Principals' Actual and Ideal Distribution of Counselor Time

Activity	Counselors' Mean Percent		Principals' Mean Percent	
	Actual	Ideal	Actual	Ideal
Testing, student appraisal	6.75	5.88*	8.02	7.25
Guidance activities (not counseling)	15.35	16.65	14.52	16.87
Individual counseling	29.09	33.79*	29.34	31.97
Group counseling	10.88	17.17*	10.16	14.78*
Professional development	4.02	5.79*	4.26	5.18
Consulting	12.34	11.99	14.09	13.29
Resource coordination services	6.09	5.94	5.72	5.90
Administrative and clerical	12.58	5.62*	10.97	5.67*
Other, non-guidance/counseling activities	4.52	1.28*	4.43	1.94*

* $p < .001$ between *actual* and *ideal*

Table 3

Counselors' Perceived Distribution of Time

	Elementary		Middle/Jr. High		Senior High	
Activity	**Mean**	**S.D.**	**Mean**	**S.D.**	**Mean**	**S.D.**
Testing, appraisal	6.29	6.70	7.27	5.39	6.68	4.02
Guidance activities	24.19*	21.16	13.18[a]	11.75	11.47[a]	8.23
Individual counseling	27.31	18.99	28.60	13.91	30.96	16.56
Group counseling	11.21	8.19	12.44	11.94	8.77	6.26
Professional development	3.64	2.92	3.78	2.70	4.55	2.98
Consultation	12.10	6.45	13.50	8.11	11.32	6.24
Resource coordination	5.43	4.58	6.38	5.38	6.11	3.30
Administrative & clerical	7.02[a]	7.42	11.83[a]	10.16	17.27*	13.06
Other, non-guidance activities	4.43	12.99	5.08	5.31	3.98	7.18

[a] Means are significnatly lower than means marked *

*$p < .001$

Table 4
Types of Counseling

Percentage of counseling time spent on:	Elementary Mean	S.D.	Middle/Jr. High Mean	S.D.	Senior High Mean	S.D.
Educational counseling	11.16[a]	13.73	29.21*[a]	19.27	47.65*	18.00
Career counseling	5.39[a]	8.31	13.42*[a]	9.05	22.15*	9.10
Personal/social counseling	77.69*	23.40	53.92*[a]	21.34	28.30[a]	15.01

a Means are significnatly lower than means marked *
*$p < .05$

Table 5

Counselors' Ideal Distribution of Time

	Elementary		Middle/Jr. High		Senior High	
Activity	**Mean**	**S.D.**	**Mean**	**S.D.**	**Mean**	**S.D.**
Testing, appraisal	4.46[a]	4.88	6.96*	5.25	5.93	3.81
Guidance activities	23.20*	14.41	13.72[a]	10.10	15.21[a]	9.72
Individual counseling	28.12[a]	13.67	34.10	15.14	37.33*	15.94
Group counseling	16.90	7.36	18.38	12.46	16.15	8.30
Professional development	5.12	3.31	5.60	3.57	6.50	3.17
Consultation	13.02	7.43	12.46	7.28	10.97	5.58
Resource coordination	5.08	4.07	6.45	5.33	6.05	3.60
Administrative & clerical	3.61[a]	4.22	5.15	4.66	7.36*	7.90
Other, non-guidance activities	1.08	2.15	1.58	2.42	1.17	2.19

[a] Means are significnatly lower than means marked *

*$p < .05$

Table 6

Principals' Ideal Distribution of Counselor Time

	All (N= 181)		Elementary (N=43)		Middle/Jr. High (N=80)		Senior High (N=58)	
Activity	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
Testing, appraisal	7.25	6.52	8.34	10.39	6.80	5.56	7.45	4.67
Guidance activities	16.87	14.24	27.98*	17.72	14.68[a]	13.11	12.88[a]	9.54
Individual counseling	31.97	16.03	24.78[a]	11.81	35.56*	16.73	33.16	16.11
Group counseling	14.78	10.06	16.37	16.01	15.22	7.57	13.52	7.88
Professional development	5.18	3.24	4.95	3.77	4.69	3.11	5.91	3.03
Consultation	13.29	8.53	11.20	7.73	13.91	10.12	13.76	7.18
Resource coordination	5.90	5.34	5.34	5.43	6.22	6.21	5.96	4.51
Administrative & clerical	5.67	5.30	4.00	3.40	5.04	4.42	6.55	5.84
Other, non-guidance activities	1.94	3.00	1.38	2.28	2.66*	3.51	1.14[a]	2.45

[a] Means are significnatly lower than means marked *

*$p < .05$

Table 7

Principals' Ideal Distribution of Counselor Time

	All (N= 181)		Elementary (N=43)		Middle/Jr. High (N=80)		Senior High (N=58)	
Activity	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
Testing, appraisal	7.25	6.52	8.34	10.39	6.80	5.56	7.45	4.67
Guidance activities	16.87	14.24	27.98*	17.72	14.68[a]	13.11	12.88[a]	9.54
Individual counseling	31.97	16.03	24.78[a]	11.81	35.56*	16.73	33.16	16.11
Group counseling	14.78	10.06	16.37	16.01	15.22	7.57	13.52	7.88
Professional development	5.18	3.24	4.95	3.77	4.69	3.11	5.91	3.03
Consultation	13.29	8.53	11.20	7.73	13.91	10.12	13.76	7.18
Resource coordination	5.90	5.34	5.34	5.43	6.22	6.21	5.96	4.51
Administrative & clerical	5.67	5.30	4.00	3.40	5.04	4.42	6.55	5.84
Other, non-guidance activities	1.94	3.00	1.38	2.28	2.66*	3.51	1.14[a]	2.45

[a] Means are significnatly lower than means marked *

*$p < .05$

Table 8
Availablity of Secretaries to Counselors

	Secreatrial Assistance Available		
Level	None	Full-time	Shared
Elementary	0.00	66.67	33.33
Middle/Jr. High	18.52	65.43	16.05
Senior High	71.19	16.95	11.86

Table 9
Counselors Having Computers in Their Offices

	Percentage With Computers	
Level	No	Yes
Elementary	13.95	86.05
Middle/Jr. High	50.00	50.00
Senior High	80.33	19.67